

Voices

Newsletter of the Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto



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PSAT co-founder, archivist, and psychiatric survivor Mel Starkman delivers a speech at the corner of Queen and Shaw to inaugurate a series of newly installed plaques designed to memorialize patient labour at the asylum formerly located on the CAMH grounds.

“These walls are the last remaining witnesses...”

GEOFFREY REAUME

To the tune of bagpipes performed by PSAT member PhebeAnn Wolframe, about one hundred people gathered on Saturday, September 25th, at the corner of Queen and Shaw, to unveil a series of nine memorial wall plaques dedicated to remembering the abilities and unpaid work of patient labourers past on the site of what is now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. After a decade of advocating for permanent public markers to disclose this history and five years since the original draft was written by PSAT, nine plaques were unveiled around the perimeter wall built by patient labourers in 1860 on the south side and 1888-89 on the east and west sides of the grounds. As this is the 150th anniversary of the oldest surviving (south) wall, the timing was considered especially appropriate for the holding of this event.

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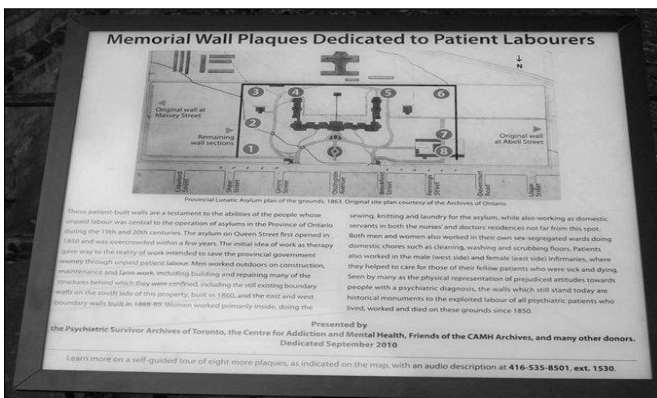
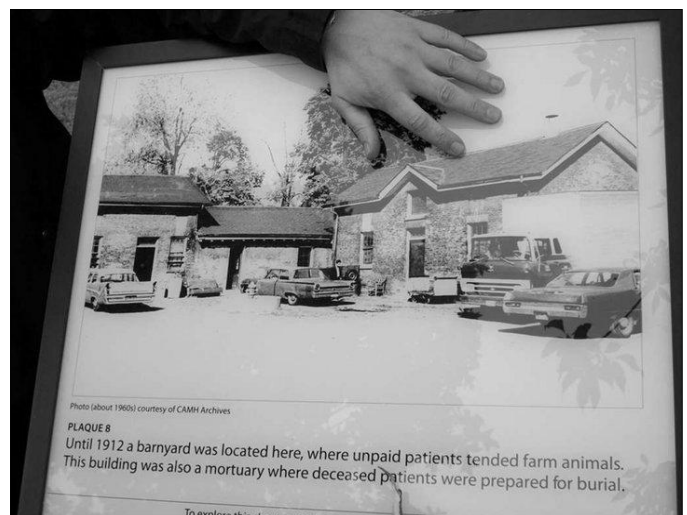
At left and below, PSAT chair Geoff Reaume describes the working and living conditions of patient labourers at the former asylum in poignant detail.

Bottom right, a close-up shot of the eighth plaque in the series, which memorializes the unpaid labour of patients who performed agricultural work. **Bottom left,** a close-up of the first plaque, which describes the purpose and historical significance of this project.

The walls have ears

Some sights and scenes from the September 25th wall plaque unveiling ceremony. Photographs © Graeme Bacque 2010.

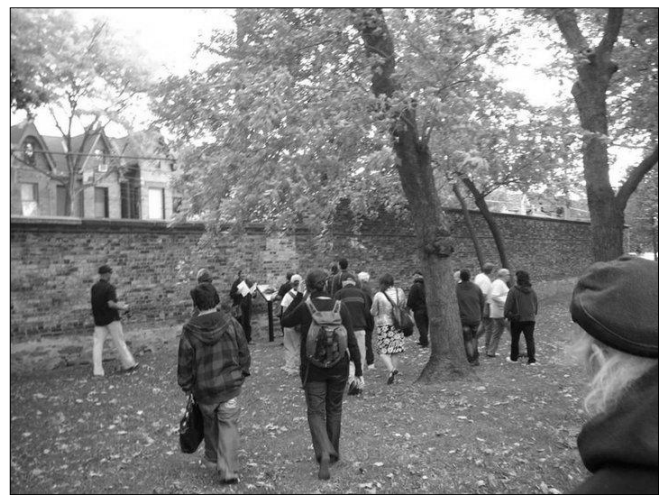
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At left, PSAT board member PhebeAnn Wolframe opens the unveiling ceremony at the southwest corner of Queen and Shaw with a solemn performance. Behind her, an onlooker snaps a photo of the first plaque in the series.

Below left, CAMH VP Susan Pigott delivers a speech prior to the wall tour. **Below right**, participants, led by Geoff Reaume, head over to a memorial plaque near the east wall. **At bottom** are close-up photos of two of the nine plaques.



Rising from the ashes

Like its mythical namesake, a historical magazine gains new life for a new generation of readers.

DON WEITZ

Phoenix Rising was a unique magazine, not simply because it was the only antipsychiatry magazine in Canada, but also because it was published by former psychiatric inmates—psychiatric survivors. *Phoenix Rising* began publishing in 1980 only to die in July 1990 due to a lack of funding. During its decade in publication, the magazine was a supporter of the international liberation movement. Thirty-two issues were produced, including three double issues exposing abuses and challenging the tyranny of psychiatry over people's lives. We focused on a wide variety of social, political and human rights issues faced by psychiatric inmates and survivors: homelessness, electroshock (ECT), forced drugging, and the abuse of the rights of women, children and elderly prisoners. We did our best to draw attention to the myth of "schizophrenia," to the deaths caused by psychiatric treatment, and to the psychiatric victimization of gays and lesbians. It is doubtful that another magazine will replace *Phoenix* in its fearless exposure of psychiatric abuses.

I founded *Phoenix Rising* with Carla McKague in 1979. We were both psychiatric survivors. We had read and been inspired by *Madness Network News*, the first inmates' liberation and antipsychiatry magazine in the U.S.; *In a Nutshell*, a newsletter of the Mental Patients Association in Vancouver; *The Cuckoo's Nest*, a now-defunct newsletter produced by psychiatric survivors of Toronto's Queen Street Mental Health Centre; and the outspoken critical writings of dissident psychiatrists such as Thomas Szasz, Peter Breggin, and R.D. Laing. Unfortunately, there are still very few dissident mental health professionals in Canada.

The first four issues were published in one year out of a two-bedroom apartment on Spadina Road in Toronto. A small, committed editorial

collective gradually formed. The first collective consisted of Carla, Cathy McPherson, Mike Yale, Joanne Yale and myself. We held frequent meetings in the apartment, and one bedroom became the office where we did all the typing, editing and layout. At the time, we had no word processor or computer. We began with very little funding, receiving a \$5,400 grant from PLURA, a multi-denominational church group which gives start-up grants to grassroots groups.

Our first issue came out in March 1980. The front cover featured an illustration of the mythic Phoenix rising from its ashes, a symbol of the psychiatric survivor reborn after a kind of death by fire. In our first editorial we

outlined our goals and philosophy, and coined the term "psychiatric inmate" to replace "mental patient." A few excerpts from this editorial, written by Carla McKague, are worth quoting:

We'd like *Phoenix Rising* to serve as a rallying point for inmates and ex-inmates who want to bring about changes in the "mental health" system that is all too often damaging rather than helpful, and oppressive rather than liberating... We want to educate the public about the shortcomings and injustices of the present system... and challenge the myths and stereotypes attached to "mental illness"... We've chosen to use the term "psychiatric inmates" rather than the conventional one of "mental patient." We were there... against our will. We lost such basic rights as the right to choose our own therapist, the right to refuse treatment, the right to leave the institution—even the right to make phone calls or have visitors. These are all rights which medical patients take for granted. In short, *we lost control over our lives*, in the same way that inmates in prison do. The fact that what happened to us was called "therapy" rather than "punishment" does not obscure this basic fact... Our hope is that by providing medical and legal information, and bringing into the open the problems of

This article consists of slightly revised excerpts from "Phoenix Rising: its Birth and Death," *Border/Lines* (Fall 1990), No. 19, pp. 14-17. **All thirty-two issues of *Phoenix Rising* are now downloadable as PDF files from the PSAT website.**

stigmatization and community rejection, by encouraging inmates and ex-inmates who have something to say to say it in *Phoenix Rising*, by pointing out abuses and injustices in the “mental health” system, and above all by offering real and constructive alternatives, we can hasten the day when the terms “mental patient” and “psychiatric inmate” are things of the past.

With these principles in mind, we began several columns. One was called “Phoenix Pharmacy,” in which we warned our readers of the numerous damaging and often deadly—not “side”—effects of many psychiatric drugs, effects like brain damage, tardive dyskinesia (a grotesque and permanent neurological disorder), and death. At first we focused on the “minor tranquilizers” such as Valium, but we soon explored the damage of the antidepressants, lithium, and powerful neuroleptics—euphemistically called “major tranquilizers” or “anti-psychotics.” We started a “Profile” column which highlighted psychiatric survivors and self-help groups doing outstanding advocacy, organizational or political work in the community. We also had a “Rights and Wrongs” section where we reported some key legal decisions directly affecting survivors.

Phoenix was probably the first Canadian periodical to point out the close links between the psychiatric inmate and the regular prisoner. In an effort to establish a common understanding of our oppression, as well as a basis for future solidarity, we used our first issue’s editorial to bring attention to the shared experiences of inmates and prisoners: sensory deprivation, forced treatment, and solitary confinement. The following are excerpts from the first editorial on psychiatric inmates and prisoners:

An inmate... is a person who is confined in a hospital, prison, etc. The “etc” includes “mental hospitals” and other involuntarily entered institutions in which people’s daily lives are totally controlled by the authorities.

People in prison and psychiatric inmates are deprived of many of the same civil and human rights. These include freedom of movement; the right to vote; the right to communicate openly with anyone... the right to privacy and confidentiality; the right to wear one’s own clothes; the right to refuse any treatment or program; the right to be treated with dignity and respect; and the right to appeal any abuse or violation of these and other rights while locked up.

In addition, people judged to be suffering from a “mental illness” and about to be involuntarily committed to a psychiatric institution are automatically denied the right to due process... [as well as] the right to legal counsel during commitment procedures. Due process is the legal right to a trial or public hearing before loss of freedom. People accused of criminal acts are routinely

given their day in court before imprisonment. However, people who have committed no crime but have been judged “insane,” “psychotic,” “suicidal,” or “dangerous” by one or two psychiatrists are routinely denied the right to defend their sanity in court before being committed.

Prisoners are traditionally given a fixed, definite sentence; they know when they will be released. Involuntarily committed inmates generally do not know this... Both prisoners and psychiatric inmates are victimized by forced “treatment.” Unlike medical patients, inmates have no right to refuse any psychiatric treatments, many of which are dangerous and damaging. ... Refusal can easily be overridden by an appeal [by a psychiatrist] to a review board; it is often interpreted as just another symptom of the patient’s “mental illness.” ... regular prisoners are often placed in “behaviour modification” programs... sometimes prisoners, especially those judged to be rebellious, ringleaders, or trouble-makers, are used as guinea pigs in dangerous and even life-threatening psychiatric experiments utilizing... drugs such as scopolamine and anectine, or “aversive conditioning.”

To call people “patients” when they are locked up and treated against their will is not only insulting, but a lie. Euphemisms such as “mental patient,” “mental hospital,” and “mental illness” obscure the facts that “mental hospitals” are in fact psychiatric prisons; that the institutional psychiatrist is actually a judge-jury-warden; that “psychiatric treatment” is a form of social control over un-cooperative or non-conforming people whose lifestyles (usually working class) are too different from or threatening to that of the upper class white psychiatrist; that terms such as “diagnosis” and “treatment” are fraudulently applied to non-existent “mental illness”; and that psychiatric “treatment” is frequently experienced as punishment.

We are not “patients.” We share with our brothers and sisters in prison the experience of being an inmate: loss of freedom, loss of civil and human rights, loss of control over our own bodies and minds, and stigmatization for life.

Our fall 1980 issue included a feature on the tragic death of 19-year-old Aldo Alviani. Although there was an inquest into Alviani’s death, the case simply served to whitewash a psychiatric crime. The Coroner’s Jury decided the cause of Alviani’s death was “therapeutic misadventure”—in other words, just a medical accident—after Alviani was forcibly subjected to roughly ten times the usual dose of Haldol in less than twenty-four hours. *Phoenix Rising* published a press release covering Alviani’s death as well as a report on the demonstration sparked by the news of his demise. This was Toronto’s first public protest against psychiatric drugging and institutional deaths.

WEITZ, CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

PSAT co-founder, Archivist, and former Queen Street patient Mel Starkman gave the unveiling remarks on behalf of the archives, while Susan Pigott, Vice President Communications and Community Engagement, spoke on behalf of CAMH. Many thanks were expressed to everyone who supported this year's long effort. This includes PSAT members who sustained the project from its inception, wrote the wording for the plaques and organized fundraising, notably the *Words on the Wall* event last April organized by Andrea White and Chris Reed. Thanked too were the many artists who donated their artwork in support of the plaques; many members of the community who donated money to make the plaques a reality; the CAMH Empowerment Council for their years of support, with Lucy Costa in particular helping numerous times to get the word out about this history to in-patients at the Centre; and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health which has worked with PSAT to preserve the patient-built walls and its history for future generations to learn from. Gratitude was also expressed to individual staff members at CAMH who pulled out all the stops in the two months before the event to ensure that the plaques, made by Systeme Huntingdon Inc. in Quebec, were in place by September 25th. This includes Holly-Ann Campbell, Kama Lee Jackson, the CAMH Creative Services team who helped with the final design, Paul Soares, Joe DeMatos and contractor Tony Del Giudice who did a superb job physically installing the plaques under an extremely tight deadline. Many thanks also go to CAMH Archivist John Court and the Friends of the Archives, including Ed Janiszewski for their support of, and work on, this effort since PSAT first proposed having permanent plaques to commemorate the unpaid labour of psychiatric patients past on this site. And special thanks must be conveyed to all of the individuals who attended wall tours over the years; these people have provided a core of support in the community for the creation of these wall plaques.

"The unveiling of these plaques ... marks the first time in Canada that the unpaid toil of psychiatric patient labourers is permanently publicly marked at the site where this history took place."

Following the unveiling remarks, a tour was held of all nine plaques during which the wording on each plaque was read out at each stop and the images described, including photos of Audrey B. and Jim P. who are included on two of the plaques to represent unpaid female and male patient labourers who toiled behind the 19th-century patient-built walls. Along with two workshops on the south side, these walls are the last remaining witnesses to the exploitation of patients' labour as well as tangible symbols of their skills.

The plaques are arranged thematically, and, for maximum public exposure all along with wall, at each of the four corners of the grounds and inside the property where patients today can see the plaques about a history that is very much their own. An introductory plaque at the busy corner of Queen and Shaw streets provides an overview of patient labour history on this site, followed by eight additional plaques throughout the grounds along the perimeter of the wall, which explain in word, image and audio text, various aspects of the female and male patient labour that was undertaken in the vicinity. The

unveiling of these plaques is an historical event in itself for it marks the first time in Canada that the unpaid toil of psychiatric patient labourers is permanently publicly marked at the site where this history took place. In so doing, these plaques will both memorialize patient labourers while helping to challenge prejudices today by ensuring that future generations know about the abilities of the people who built these walls and who worked behind them for so long, receiving neither pay nor recognition. Now, with these plaques along the walls at CAMH, people like Audrey B and Jim P are commemorated for all to think about and remember.

Geoffrey Reaume is Associate Professor of Critical Disability Studies at York University. His doctoral thesis explored patient life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, Ontario's oldest psychiatric hospital, and was republished as a book in 2009 (*Remembrance of Patients Past*, University of Toronto Press). **For an audio history tour of the patient-built wall please call: 416-535-8501, ext. 1530.**

At right, PSAT board member Don Weitz distributes previous issues of *Voices* at our Mad Pride Week Survivor Showcase info table.

Our display exhibited covers and copies of periodicals that have been authored and edited by psychiatric survivors around the world over the years, including the *Madness Network News* (United States), *Phoenix Rising* (Canada), the *Not So Patient Voice* (Athens, Ohio), *In a Nutshell* (British Columbia), and a multitude of others, including a wide variety of foreign language journals.

Many thanks to board member Ji-Eun Lee for designing and creating the signage for our table, and who staffed the adjoining kiosk of the Mad Students' Society.



At left, PSAT archivist Mel Starkman poses heroically for the camera. Visible in the background is an information display for A-Way Express, a courier service operated and staffed by psychiatric survivors.

Below, PSAT chair Geoff Reaume discusses the showcase with another attendee. Other community organizations' tables can be seen in the background.



On the 15th of this past July, as part of Toronto's annual

Mad Pride Week PSAT

participated in a lively showcase of organizations, community groups, and peer support services for mad-identified people and psychiatric consumer-survivors in the City Hall Members Lounge. The event, called "Still Crazy After All These Years," was coordinated by A-Way Express Courier Services and catered by the Raging Spoon. Participants enjoyed live entertainment, special presentations, complimentary refreshments, and a panoply of networking opportunities.

Here are some photographs of PSAT's information kiosk, as well as some of the board members who staffed it and answered participants' questions that afternoon. Photographs © Eugenia Tsao 2010.

Because legal rights have been central to our cause, over the years we took particular interest in the legal implications of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. "The Charter of Rights and Freedoms vs. the Psychiatric System" was the title of a double issue published in August 1985.

Despite the odds, we brought out two more issues which rank among our very best. Our May 1989 issue focused on the psychiatric atrocities suffered by prisoners. It scrutinized solitary confinement, forced drugging and the dangerous behaviour modification "programs" which still exist in Oak Ridge, the notorious behaviour modification wing of Penetang [Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre]. In it, we established a Prisoner Network, which prisoners and ex-prisoners could use for

advocacy, legal advice, and support, and we identified over eighty prisoners' rights groups, newsletters and journals in the United States, Canada, and other countries, including thirty-seven in Canada. We made a special effort to reach out to more prisoners, to let them know that we care deeply about their issues and the injustices they, like us, have experienced.

Although the magazine stopped publishing over twenty years ago, the mythic Phoenix continues to inspire oppressed and suffering people to rise up out of the ashes and keep rising.

Don Weitz is an antipsychiatry activist, co-editor of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada* (1988), host-producer of "Antipsychiatry Radio" on CKLN Radio, PSAT board member, and co-founder of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA). He lives in Toronto.

Urgent request

PSAT is currently searching for vacant office space in which to store its collections and open a reading room. If you know of any available space, please contact Don Weitz (dweitz@rogers.com) or Mel Starkman (melqstarkman@yahoo.ca) as soon as possible. Thanks!

Your by-line here

Are you interested in contributing to *Voices*? The PSAT editorial team welcomes submissions of essays, news articles, op-eds, poetry, short stories, photographs and artwork that fall within our organization's mandate of ensuring that the rich history of those who have experienced the psychiatric system is preserved as a resource from which all communities can share and learn. Contributors retain copyright of their own work. Images will be published in monochrome.

If you are interested in contributing content to a future issue, please e-mail your submission to psychsurvivorarchives@gmail.com, with the subject heading "**Voices submission**," and a **brief author's biography**. You may include an e-mail address for reader correspondence if you wish. Your piece should either be saved in one of the following formats — **.doc, .pdf, .rtf, .txt, .jpg, .tif** — or contained within the body of your e-mail. Please do not send hard copies of your submission by mail. If your piece is selected for publication, we will notify you by e-mail. The editors reserve the right to copyedit submissions for grammar and clarity. Thank you!